

LegCo Secretariat releases Research Brief on “Nurturing of local talent”

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The Legislative Council Secretariat (the Secretariat) today (June 1) released a Research Brief on "Nurturing of local talent".

Hong Kong is lagging behind many developed economies in nourishing local talent. Cultivating STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) literacy in primary and secondary schools, as well as building a local talent base sourced from university graduates, should help boost the supply of local talent.

While the Government has invested a lot of resources in STEM education, the efforts to promote STEM are planned by schools themselves under the "school-oriented" approach. Some schools and teachers have inevitably encountered problems and obstacles when implementing STEM education, which include vague teaching guidelines, and teachers without enough experience, confidence and support.

Other developed economies have made significant investment in STEM educational initiatives. In particular, the Singapore's Ministry of Education has partnered STEM Inc in developing and implementing STEM education. STEM Inc works with teachers to co-develop STEM curriculum and co-teach STEM lessons.

Hong Kong's secondary students fail to have a balanced introduction to STEM education. Science subjects are optional at senior secondary level. Half of the 2019 Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination candidates had no exposure to a science subject. Enrolment rate of Secondary Six students in advanced mathematics declined from 22.9 per cent in 2011-2012 to 14.4 per cent in 2018-2019.

At universities in Hong Kong, STEM programmes also fail to attract students with the best academic results and places on research postgraduate programmes have been filled largely by Mainland students. Hong Kong's talent admission schemes have met with limited success in attracting Mainland students to work and stay in the territory after graduation.

Meanwhile, the need for continuing education after formal schooling is also important for talent to keep abreast of new knowledge and skills and avoid becoming obsolete. The Government set up the Continuing Education Fund as early as in June 2002, but the continuing education participation rates have been relatively low over the years.

In contrast, Singapore has been identified as a successful example of incentivizing firms and individuals to invest in continuing education through its SkillsFuture movement. Singaporeans are provided with SkillsFuture Credit

to pay for approved courses, and the Singaporean government will provide periodic top-ups. Generous government subsidies are also provided for self-sponsoring and employer-sponsoring courses, and employers are entitled to Absentee Payroll funding as well.

The subject of nurturing of local talent falls within the policy area of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Manpower.

The Research Brief is prepared by the Secretariat's Research Office of the Information Services Division with a view to enhancing information support for Members. It is a concise summary aiming at explaining a subject matter which may be of interest to Members and the general public.

The Research Brief is now available on the LegCo Website at www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1920rb03-nurturing-of-local-talent-20200601-e.pdf.